

“Single Married Divorced or Widowed,” Part 5 - 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 – February 8th, 2015

- Today's teaching will be part five of a series I've titled, "Single Married Divorced or Widowed."
- Once again, our text today won't require the warning previous ones did. Paul will answer questions about divorce and children.
- Up to this point, he's answered several questions concerning the issues related to the Christian marriage and even divorce.

5. What if I'm married to an unbeliever? (Verses 12-14)

12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

- v12 Paul says if a husband as a believer has a wife that's not a believer but she's willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.
- v13 He then says to the wife who has a husband that's not a believer but is willing to stay with her she must not divorce him.
- v14 He says the reason is that the unbeliever has been sanctified through the believer, otherwise the children would be unclean.

- In order to better understand what Paul is saying here, it's important we make the distinction between the two different groups.
- Unlike those whom he addressed in the previous verses where both husband and wife are Christians, only one is in this group.
- It's for this reason that Paul says, "to the rest" of you. In other words, to the rest of you who are married to a non-Christian.

- Notice Paul not only answers their question concerning this, but he also provides them the reasons why they shouldn't divorce.
- More specifically, one reason why is because the non-Christian husband or wife is sanctified by the Christian husband or wife.
- This does not mean that staying married to the Christian saves the non-Christian; rather, it means that they will be blessed.

Of this one commentator wrote, "Sanctified, in this context, does not mean that the unbelieving spouse is saved just by being married to a Christian. It simply means that they are set apart for a special working in their lives by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of being so close to someone who is a Christian."

- Be that as it may, Paul then goes on to provide yet another reason for a Christian to stay married to their non-Christian spouse.
- Namely, that of their children remaining holy as opposed to being un-clean when the Christian husband or wife seeks a divorce.
- Paul's language is stronger here, such that, he uses words like, "unclean" and "holy," whereas with adults he uses "sanctified."

- This one verse has been the subject of much debate, amongst many, over the years, as it relates to the age of accountability.
- There is also some debate concerning those children who are in a home where neither the husband nor the wife are Christians.
- This because, Paul seems to indicate that a child is made holy only within the context of a marriage where one is a Christian.

- Here's why, Paul is providing them reasons as to why they should stay married and one of those reasons is for their children.
- This implies that if you don't stay married to your non-Christian husband or wife then you're children will be unclean and unholy.
- If it didn't, then it would certainly stand to reason that Paul would not present it as a reason and motivation to remain married.

- Now this begs the question of whether or not children below the age of accountability in a non-Christian home will go to heaven.
- Some answer this by saying, yes they do, others, by virtue of verse fourteen here in chapter seven argue that they would not.
- To me the greater question, whether one is a Christian or both are non-Christians, has to do with a child's age of accountability.

- There is a vast array of differing opinions on this, with some suggesting it's younger than one thinks, yet others say it's older.
- Perhaps this would be as good of a time as any to answer the question of what does the age of accountability actually mean.
- Simply put, it's the age of a child at the time they are accountable before God for their sins and can grasp the concept of grace.

Henry Morris - "Until he is old enough to take responsibility upon himself, the child of a believing parent is to be regarded as Christian. The parents 'holiness' extends to the child."

- I would like to once again mention an outstanding website for questions such as this; it's gotquestions.org. Here's the question:
- Question: "Where do I find the age of accountability in the Bible? What happens to babies and young children when they die?"
- Answer: The concept of the "age of accountability" is that children are not held accountable by God for their sins until they reach a certain age, and that if a child dies before reaching the "age of accountability," that child will, by the grace and mercy of God, be granted entrance into heaven.

<http://www.gotquestions.org/age-of-accountability.html#ixzz3QuluGo7h>

- Here's the bottom line, it is God's desire to bless the husband, the wife, and their children when a couple remains married.
- This for a number of reasons chief of which is that the Christian marriage is a prophetic picture of our relationship with Christ.
- Born again believers make up the body of Christ as the bride of Christ. As such, we are so valued and loved by our bridegroom.

- I want to close with a story I first heard from my pastor back in the 80's. It's about a husband who loved and valued his wife.
- It's titled, "Johnny Lingo's Eight-Cow Wife." It was in Reader's Digest in 1988, but originally written by Patricia McGerr in 1965.

Johnny Lingo's Eight-Cow Wife

My trip to the Kiniwata Island in the Pacific was a memorable one. Although the island was beautiful and I had an enjoyable time, the thing I remember most about my trip was the fact "Johnny Lingo gave eight cows for his wife." I'm reminded of it every time I see a woman belittle her husband or a wife wither under her husband's scorn. I want to say to them, "You should know *why* Johnny Lingo gave eight cows for his wife." Johnny Lingo is known throughout the islands for his skills, intelligence, and savvy. If you hire him as a guide, he will show you the best fishing spots and the best places to get pearls. Johnny is also one of the sharpest traders in the islands. He can get you the best possible deals. The people of Kiniwata all speak highly of Johnny Lingo. Yet, when they speak of him, they always smile just a little mockingly. A couple days after my arrival to Kiniwata, I went to the manager of the guesthouse to see who he thought would be a good fishing guide. "Johnny Lingo," said the manager. "He's the best around. When you go shopping, let him do the bargaining. Johnny knows how to make a deal." "Johnny Lingo!" hooted a nearby boy. The boy rocked with laughter as he said, "Yea, Johnny can make a deal alright!" "What's going on?" I demanded. "Everybody tells me to get in touch with Johnny Lingo and then they start laughing. Please, let me in on the joke." "Oh, the people like to laugh," the manager said, shrugging. "Johnny's the brightest and strongest young man in the islands. He's also the richest for his age." "But ..." I protested. "... if he's all you say he is, why does everyone laugh at him behind his back?" "Well, there is one thing. Five months ago, at fall festival, Johnny came to Kiniwata and found himself a wife. He gave her father eight cows!"

I knew enough about island customs to be impressed. A dowry of two or three cows would net a fair wife and four or five cows would net a very nice wife. "Wow!" I said. "Eight cows! She must have beauty that takes your breath away." "She's not ugly, ..." he conceded with a little smile, "... but calling her 'plain' would definitely be a compliment. Sam Karoo, her father, was afraid he wouldn't be able to marry her off. Instead of being stuck with her, he got eight cows for her. Isn't that extraordinary? This price has never been paid before." "Yet, you called Johnny's wife 'plain'?" "I said it would be a compliment to call her plain. She was skinny and she walked with her shoulders hunched and her head ducked. She was scared of her own shadow." "Well," I said, "I guess there's just no accounting for love." "True enough," agreed the man. "That's why the villagers grin when they talk about Johnny. They get special satisfaction from the fact the sharpest trader in the islands was bested by dull old Sam Karoo." "But how?" "No one knows and everyone wonders. All of the cousins urged Sam to ask for three cows and hold out for two until he was sure Johnny would pay only one. To their surprise Johnny came to Sam Karoo and said, 'Father of Sarita, I offer eight cows for your daughter.' " "Eight cows." I murmured. "I'd like to meet this Johnny Lingo."

I wanted fish and pearls, so the next afternoon I went to the island of Nurabandi. As I asked directions to Johnny's house, I noticed Johnny's neighbors were also amused at the mention of his name. When I met the slim, serious young man I could see immediately why everyone respected his skills. However, this only reinforced my confusion over him. As we sat in his house, he asked me, "You come here from Kiniwata?" "Yes." "They speak of me on that island?" "Yes. They say you can provide me anything I need. They say you're intelligent, resourceful, and the sharpest trader in the islands." He smiled gently. "My wife is from Kiniwata." "Yes, I know." "They speak of her?" "A little." "What do they say?" "Why, just" The question caught me off balance. "They told me you were married at festival time." "Nothing more?" The curve of his eyebrows told me he knew there had to be more. "They also say the marriage settlement was eight cows." I paused. "They wonder why." "They ask that?" His eyes lighted with pleasure. "Everyone in Kiniwata knows about the eight cows?" I nodded. "And in Nurabandi, everyone knows it too?" His chest expanded with satisfaction. "Always and forever, when they speak of marriage settlements, it will be remembered that Johnny Lingo paid eight cows for Sarita." So that's the answer, I thought: Vanity. Just then Sarita entered the room to place flowers on the table. She stood still for a moment to smile at her husband and then left. She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. The lift of her shoulders, the tilt of her chin, and the sparkle in her eyes all spelled self-confidence and pride. Not an arrogant and haughty pride, but a confident inner beauty that radiated in her every movement.

I turned back to Johnny and found him looking at me. "You admire her?" he murmured. "She ... she's gorgeous." I said. "Obviously, this is not the one everyone is talking about. She can't be the Sarita you married on Kiniwata." "There's only one Sarita. Perhaps, she doesn't look the way you expected." "She doesn't. I heard she was homely. They all make fun of you because you let yourself be cheated by Sam Karoo." "You think eight cows was too many?" A smile slid over his lips. "No, but how can she be so different from the way they described her?" Johnny said, "Think about how it must make a girl feel to know her husband paid a very low dowry for her? It must be insulting to her to know he places such little value on her. Think about how she must feel when the other women boast about the high prices their husbands paid for them. It must be embarrassing for her. I would not let this happen to my Sarita." "So, you paid eight cows just to make your wife happy?" "Well, of course I wanted Sarita to be happy, but there's more to it than that. You say she is different from what you expected. This is true. Many things can change a woman. There are things that happen on the inside and things that happen on the outside. However, the thing that matters most is how she views herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. As a result, that's the value she projected. Now, she knows she is worth more than any other woman in the islands. It shows, doesn't it?" "Then you wanted ..." "I wanted to marry Sarita. She is the only woman I love." "But ..." I was close to understanding. "But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."